

## **STRATEGY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF WOMEN OFFENDERS**

Minister of Justice, Paul Goggins, today announced the publication of a consultation document on a strategy for the management of women offenders in Northern Ireland. The strategy is a collaborative initiative between the Northern Ireland Office, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Prison Service. It is aimed at improving the criminal justice system's approach to the management of women offenders in Northern Ireland.

Speaking at a meeting with criminal justice partners in Probation Board offices earlier today Paul Goggins said:

**“Tackling the often complex issues which lie behind women’s offending is essential if we are to reduce offending.**

**“I whole-heartedly endorse the approach taken in this strategy which represents a significant step towards building on existing services to produce a more co-ordinated, long-term and sustainable approach to addressing the needs of women offenders, both in the community and in custody.**

**“The strategy builds on the learning from Baroness Corston’s review in England and Wales which looked at what more could be done to tackle problems at an earlier point and, where possible, avoid vulnerable women ending up in prison.”**

Highlighting the need for a more gender-specific approach, the Minister added:

**“The strategy acknowledges that the response to the needs of women offenders must sometimes differ from that offered to men. Issues such as the impact of a mother’s imprisonment on children and families convince me that we must develop a range of more creative and constructive alternatives to imprisonment for women, where that is appropriate.**

**“The response of the criminal justice rights system must be proportionate – and, for some women, custody will be the response. But the criminal justice system must also provide alternatives which give the courts greater opportunity, where appropriate, to apply sanctions that enable women offenders to be dealt with more effectively in the community.**

**“In addition, a coordinated approach to addressing issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental illness, abuse, domestic violence, and addictions will be vital in improving current service delivery on the ground and in bringing about a reduction in women’s offending.”**

Acknowledging that, for some women offenders, there was no alternative to custody, the Minister said:

**“For those women for whom there is no alternative, we must ensure that we provide a tailored approach to their management in custody. It has been recognised for some time that the prison accommodation currently provided for women prisoners is not ideal, and that there is a need to provide, a separate facility for women prisoners.**

**“In keeping with the development of the overall strategy, the Prison Service has been examining the options for a future alternative location for the women in Ash House at Hydebank Wood.”**

The consultation will run from 23 February 2009 to 18 May 2009.